

# Fidalgo Bay State Aquatic Reserve



## Site History

Until industrialized the bay was fished by native tribes and early settlers. Shellfish middens have been identified within the site. Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, an 11,000 acre reserve with expansive eelgrass beds, is a short distance to the east. An abandoned railroad trestle crosses the mid-section of the site, and oil refinery activities take place just east of the site. The reserve includes nearly 400 acres of tide flats purchased by the Skagit Land Trust and later transferred to DNR.

This site was among the first sites formally withdrawn from leasing by Commissioner of Public Lands Jennifer Belcher on May 23, 2000.

## Aquatic Reserve Program

The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages about 2.4 million acres of aquatic lands on behalf of the public. DNR established three types of reserves (WAC 332-30-151) to help ensure environmental protection for public aquatic lands — Education, Environmental and Scientific Reserves. Using this authority the Commissioner of Public Lands withdrew six sites from leasing to be considered for Aquatic Reserve status during 2000.

During 2002, DNR developed an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Aquatic Reserves Program. The final EIS was adopted in September 2002.

## Site Evaluation

All six sites withdrawn from leasing in 2000 will be evaluated for Aquatic Reserve status during 2003. Sites will be evaluated using designation criteria identified in the programmatic EIS. Guidance for the use of these designation criteria is currently being developed by DNR with the assistance of an external peer review committee.

Evaluation of the sites will be completed by a Technical Advisory Committee. DNR is currently collecting all available information regarding each of the six reserve sites through research and public meetings. The committee will evaluate this information and visit each site before making their recommendation to the Commissioner of Public Lands.

## Natural Resources

Fidalgo Bay is used by a healthy spawning stock of Pacific herring that spawn on the eelgrass flats that cover most of the bay between January and April of each year. Shores along the site are spawning areas for other forage fish including surf smelt and sand lance. Bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and great blue herons are frequently found at the site, while chinook salmon and migratory waterfowl are seasonally abundant in the area.

Large eelgrass flats are found in much of the bay with fringing salt marsh habitat along the southern parts of the bay. A large, unarmored spit, Crandall Spit is along the northern edge of the site.

## Site Management

Following the determination by the Commissioner of Public Lands regarding Aquatic Reserve status, DNR will begin a State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA) public process to develop management plans for each site. This process will occur for sites designated as Aquatic Reserves as well as those that will no longer be part of the Aquatic Reserve Program.

DNR expects to work with many partners, including other agencies, tribes, local governments and organizations to develop and implement management plans for Aquatic Reserves.

## Aquatic Reserve Timeline

